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## A DRY CYCLOPEAN COUNTRY WALL

BY SAMUEL PARSONS

A STONE wall along a country road is always pleasing.

The senses are unconsciously refreshed by its rustic lines, suggesting the likelihood of the presence of green fields beyond. Its colors are soft and neutral as becomes stone that has weathered for years and an occasional vine growing over its surface lends charm to its simple natural features.

The crown or top of the wall is usually irregular,

are draped over them, these walls have always been accepted as belonging to the highest type of this kind of art. They harmonize perfectly with the buildings of which they are generally a part. I would not for a moment belittle walls of so excellent a type, for they have rightfully received the sanction of long-established practise.

A stone wall on a highway fronting a country estate however, I have come to think, needs some-



FIG. 1—CORNER OF THE DRY CYCLOPEAN WALL

having no proper coping and showing gaps of different sizes between the multiformed stones. These gaps in all ordinary walls are filled or "chinked up" with small pieces of stone or "spawls." Attractive, however, as most country walls are, they can be hardly said to offer the final word in rustic art, especially as it applies to landscape architecture. They have doubtless a beauty and fitness of their own, but they can be scarcely said to offer an illustration of genuine art of any kind.

As architecture developed walls naturally gained higher finish: their lines were laid out in geometric forms and their surfaces were smoothed and polished and finished with copings which were carefully fitted and closed with mortar. When vines

thing different. The ordinary stone fence of the fields is too crude and lacks a definite artistic effect, while the architectural wall referred to is too ornate, too evidently artificial, and under some circumstances too pretentious. From these considerations sprang the idea of working in a style a little sophisticated, as it were, in any case more studied than the common wall and at the same time quite as natural in effect. To make such an effect required renunciation of long-established customs and perhaps violence done to properly venerated standards. In a way it is an experiment, and yet in reality no experiment, for its design is based on the soundest principles of artistic construction in landscape architecture.



FIG. 2—CONTINUATION OF THE WALL

It has been said that "the artist, the discoverer, the philosopher, the lover, the patriot, the true enthusiast for any form of life can only achieve the full reality to which his special art or passion gives access by innumerable renunciations." Whatever unique and specially fitting beauty might come to this wall, would I believe come from definite renunciations. To give up the use of all cutting tools and visible mortar, to fit together as best I could great jagged pieces of rock; to make a genuine megalithic structure with gaping crevices filled with earth instead of small stones, certainly would require, I recognized, renunciation of several sorts.

The first thing to do, however, was to find the right kind of stone: eventually it was found in an old quarry. It lay in a neglected heap where for many years the weather had contrived to soften its colors and round its contours. Nature had apparently left this heap of stone stranded in a back water of primeval existence in order to endue it with the fullest measure of its own essential and most characteristic beauty. "To the solid ground of nature trusts the mind that builds for age": thus writes Wordsworth, and in the same spirit all the details of this wall have been worked out. Naturally the stones were selected and assorted with the greatest care and in many sizes, none being less than three feet and some even eight and ten feet long, and it was just in the assortment of these stones that the most characteristic effect could be

obtained. Moreover an eye had to be kept to the future and the probable appearance ten years hence forecast. Fine as the wall might be made now, its future state should be much superior if, year by year, its development could be properly managed. Time is a good fellow, says a Roman proverb, and the later effect of this crystalline and color-changing structure can not fail to be greater and greater as time goes on—for those who have eyes to appreciate.

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You may have heard the story of Eyes and No Eyes. No Eyes has fixed his attention on the fact he is obliged to take a walk. For him the chief object of existence is his own movement along the road, a movement which he intends to accomplish as efficiently and as comfortably as he can. He asks not to know what may be on either side of the hedge. He ignores the cares of the wind until it threatens to remove his hat. He trudges along, steadily and diligently avoiding the muddy pools, but oblivious of the light they reflect. Eyes takes the walk too, and for him it is a perpetual revelation of beauty and wonder. The sunlight inebriates him, the winds delight him, the every effort of the journey is a joy. Magic presences throng the roadside or cry salutations to him from the hidden fields. The rich world through which he moves lies in the foreground of his consciousness and gives up new secrets to him at every step. No Eyes, when told of

his adventures, refuses to believe that both have gone by the same road. He fancies his companion has been floating in the air, or beset by agreeable hallucinations. We shall never persuade him to the contrary unless we persuade him to look for himself.

Perhaps all or most of us fail to see all the beauty of things, natural, everyday-looking things, unless we are poets or artists; but on the other hand I also believe that all of us have something of the nature of the artist's Eye in us, if we would only give our vision full play! In fact I feel sure that if the full orb of such an Eye as we may have, can only be made to dwell long enough and quietly enough on our wall, its beauty will begin to dawn on one in a surprising way. At first it may appear to be simply a commonplace stone wall with vines and flowers growing about it; but walk along its whole front (1400 feet) back and forth for half an hour and you will begin to see beauties you little dreamt of; there will be revelations of Nature's doing that the observer will find well worth studying carefully with such seeing eyes as he may be fortunate enough to possess.

The stone itself gives, in the first place, great distinction to the wall, for it is granite—warm pink or brown granite—and granite takes high rank among stones; even if it were only ordinary stone it would still have decided elements of interest. Ruskin says in his inimitable way "Trees and clouds and

riders are enjoyable even by the careless, but the stone under his foot has for carelessness nothing in it but stumbling; no pleasure is languidly had out of it, nor food, nor good of any kind; nothing but symbolism of the hard heart and the unfatherly gift. And yet, do but give it some reverence and watchfulness, and there is bread for thought in it more than in any lowly feature in all the landscape. For a stone when it is examined will be found a mountain in miniature. The fineness of Nature's work is so great that in a single block a foot or two in diameter she can compress as many changes of form and structure on a small scale as she needs for her mountains on a large one; and, taking moss for forests and grains of crystal for crags, the surface of a stone in by far the plurality of instances is more interesting than the surface of an ordinary hill, more fantastic in form and incomparably richer in color—the last quality being in fact so noble in most stones of good birth, that is to say, fallen from crystalline mountain ranges, that I shall be less able to illustrate this part of my subject satisfactorily by means of engraving than perhaps any other except the color of the skies."

Ranging alongside the great blocks of granite in the wall, in some cases almost ten feet long, notice how wonderfully they are indented and carved by writhed and tortuous lines produced by the undulating grain of the crystalline structure. One can fancy he sees almost anything in the way of strange



FIG. 3—ONE OF THE POSTS AT ENTRANCE OF ESTATE



forms developed by the distorted granite, shapes of snakes and other grotesque animals, dark, almost black, inbedded in exquisite shades of rose and pink suffusing the light brown tint which makes the general color of the wall. These lines are myriad and of a beauty that can not be described. The longer you look at them the more you feel the charm of the details. Wrought in the same spirit, the entire wall presents an association of masses of rock whose grouping has been carefully studied, and at the same time they seem to be unstudied and natural. The larger masses find their proper places at the base of the wall next to the ground; the groups of different sizes, forms and colors are brought together on a preconceived and definitely artistic plan. It may be said that there has been evidently a distinct intention to promote a happy union of parts in a single and unified scheme of construction. A rough coping of the same great blocks, blasted and hammered into more regular shapes, surmounts the wall and gives it dignity and completeness.

In its essential qualities, those which actually make the wall what it is, simplicity extends everywhere, even to the minutest detail with which the work of its construction is carried out. It will be seen at once that its scheme of design is not in accord with common standards. The professional tradition of the ordinary mason, be he ever so skilful, revolts from it, as was proven when the construction was first undertaken. The wall finally was really built by an Italian laborer and his mates who received careful and almost daily instructions, which they faithfully and often enthusiastically obeyed. Italians have an instinctive and hereditary love for stone work and although their ideas are often crudely and coarsely fanciful they are not always by any means bad.

When the wall was built and the beauty of its stone fully demonstrated it was felt that though nature would doubtless eventually drape it with vines and mosses like plants, even in time with lichens, the art of horticulture could be employed to hasten and develop in the finest way its greatest capacity for beauty. Following this idea, plants of various kinds were used to drape and as it were costume the bare stones with natural and fitting tapestries. In order to secure the most characteristic and rapid growth of these tapestries quantities of rich mould or earth were crammed into the gaping cracks of the dry wall. In these spaces were grown great numbers of what are usually termed rock plants, that need little sun and earth and moisture—such perennials as golden moss (*Sedum acre*) house leeks and wild cactuses. Very beautiful are these exquisite and delicate growths. Their color-harmonies are like music in a minor key. Ruskin writes about such plants in the following lines, which are so illuminating that I will venture to quote them in full: "Lichens and mosses (though these last in their luxuriance are deep and rich as herbage, yet both for the most part humblest of green things that live) how of these? Meek creatures! the first mercy of the earth, veiling with hushed softness its dintless rocks; creatures full of pity, covering with strange tender honor the scarred disgrace of ruin, laying quiet fingers on the tremb-

ling stones to teach them rest. No word that I know of will say what these mosses are. None are delicate enough, none perfect enough, none rich enough. How is one to tell of the starred divisions of rubied (or golden) bloom, fine-filmed, as if the Rock Spirits could spin porphyry as we do glass—the tracteries of intricate silver and fringes of amber, lustrous, arborescent, burnished through every fibre in its fitful brightness and glossy traverses of silken change, yet all subdued and pensive and framed for simplest, sweetest offices of grace. They will not be gathered like the flowers for chaplet or love-token; but of these the wild bird will make her nest and the wearied child his pillow. Yet—in one sense the humblest, in another they are the most honored of earth's children. Unfading as motionless, the worm frets them not, the autumn wastes. Strong in lowliness, they neither blanch in heat nor pine in frost. To them, slow fingered, constant hearted, is entrusted the weaving the dark eternal tapestries of the hills; to them, slow penciled, iris dyed, the tender framing of their endless imagery. Sharing the stillness of the unimpassioned rock, they share also its endurance; and while the winds of departing spring scatter the white hawthorn blossoms like drifted snow, and the summer dims on the parched meadows the drooping of its cowslip gold, the silver lichen-spots rest starlike on the stone; and the gathering of orange stain upon the edge of yonder western peak reflects the sunsets of a thousand years."

Soft and delicate as the mosses and various other perennials are, an equally effective tapestry has been used on this wall to frame the individual masses of stone. Wreathing the crevices and outlining almost every block are found the graceful evergreen draperies of the vine *Evonymus radicans*. Naturally they need guiding and pruning, although the species is not a rampant grower. If this were not done with all the vines on the wall to a greater or less extent, the beauty of the stones would soon be swamped by an overgrowth of foliage. The crowning attraction of the coping, however, is the presence of great quantities of the Japanese rose (*Rosa wichuraiana*) commonly called the Memorial Rose. The flowers of its different varieties or hybrids, varying from yellow and crimson to red and white variegation, are produced in great quantities. All the vines when they have reached the coping from the back of the wall where they have been planted, have been carefully trained by pruning and adjusting the growth of the branches, so that they may not reach forward and down and veil the beauty of the panels of stone facing the highway.

In the midst of the masses of roses appear at frequent intervals many kinds of vines, notably common Virginia Creeper, richest in color of autumn climbers, the Japanese Ivy (*Ampelopsis veitchii*), white clematis, summer blooming, and the trumpet vine. They form a veritable crown of glory on the crest of the wall, with plenty of unoccupied cracks left for stone-crop and house-leek. Thus year after year Nature pushes forward her work of rustic adornment, changing its appearance in endless ways. For instance, as the process of weathering progresses the wall takes on richer and more delicate lines and a fine veil seems almost imper-

ceptibly to be weaving itself over the surface, lending a peculiar charm to the entire effect like that of the patina on some fine old bronze statue. Jeffery has expressed charmingly his appreciation of this kind of horticulture. He says "Stone walls are not left without a fringe on the hardest brick; on the sapless tiles, on slates stone-crop takes hold and becomes a cushion of yellow bloom. Nature is a miniature painter and handles a delicate brush, the tip of which touches the tiniest spot and leaves something living."

The wall itself, in all that goes to make a wall beautiful, was at this stage well-nigh complete and finished. One thing more, however, it was felt was needed to give a proper setting to its unquestionable attractions, and that was wild flowers—perennials growing at its foot, a touch of life to relieve the edge or border of the wall, something homely in the best sense, something that might be expected to grow naturally of itself in such surroundings. The wild flowers selected were not tall-growing and thus liable to obscure the wall, but so chosen as to present a variety of flower and leaf throughout the season. In the narrow strip of earth along the stone work were many of the dwarfer ferns, the sensitive, the gossamer, spleenwort and others. Many saxifrages and primroses were found here, and daffodils, blood-root, "babies' breath," irises of various sorts and

day lilies, also bluebells, corn-flowers, sea-lavender, pinks, meadow-sweet, anemones, milkweed and goldenrod and the poet's narcissus. Between these flowers, in many places, seed vessels and stems of the golden moss (*Sedum acre*) have fallen from the mother plant to the ground from the crevices of the wall above and covered the bare, dark earth with a yellowish green carpet.

Another beautiful feature of the scene is the greensward, the sweetest bit of Nature that God's sun shines upon, clear, unmitigated greensward, fretted not "with the eternal havoc of the sodden leaves, rotting the floors of autumn," but cleaned and tended in the most solicitous way. Nearly twenty-seven centuries ago Sappho wrote of the delight "of treading on the fine, soft bloom of the grass." One has the same feeling now on moving along the border of this wall, where a wide way of perfect turf unmarred by gravel walk or curb offers its velvety surface to embrace the far-reaching shadows of the bordering purple maples. Here indeed, it may be said, abides the true home of Wordsworth's

Violet by a mossy stone  
Half hidden from the eye,  
Fair as a star when only one  
Is shining in the sky.

Samuel Parsons

## BALLADE DES BELLES MILATRAISSES

NEW ORLEANS 1820-1860

'Tis the Octoroon Ball and the halls are alight!

The music is playing an old-time "Galop,"

The women are "fair" and the cavaliers white. . .

(Play on, fiddler-man, keep your eyes on your bow)  
*Cocodrie! Cocodrie!* what strange shadows you throw

Along the dark street on the door barred to you!  
Light *les belles Milatraisses* with your lantern, and go!

*Trouloulou! Trouloulou! c'est pas zaffaire à tou!*

The music grows madder! the ball's at its height:

For frail beauty and kisses it's hey! and it's ho!

These women are fair, for an hour, a night,

(Play on, fiddler-man, keep your eyes on your bow!)

And for all dull to-morrows, to-night who'd forego?

The music grows madder! they flee and pursue!—

*Cocodrie*, in the dark how your sombre eyes glow!

*Trouloulou! Trouloulou! c'est pas zaffaire à tou!*

They are ready and eager to love or to fight!

Hot blood is aflame and the red wine aflow!

These women are theirs! who dare question their right?

(Play on, fiddler-man, keep your hands on your bow!)

Who prowls there, outside, in the dark, to and fro

To and fro, by the door that he may not pass through?—

*Cocodrie!* you mad slave! you won death by that blow!—

Play on! *Trouloulou, c'est pas zaffaire à tou!*

Envoi

THE CONVENT—1900

This dim-tapered chapel! These forms bending low!  
(Fiddler-man of the past, is this Dirge from your bow?)

Are they black-hooded ghosts of the dancers we knew

On their knees at the last—"zaffaire c'est pas à tou"?

Rosalie M. Jonas

NOTE.

The "Octoroon Balls" took place in a handsome old building in the Creole quarter of New Orleans. This same building in later days has been turned into a Catholic convent.

*Milatraisse* was the generic term for all that class: the freed or free-born octoroon or quadroon woman.

*Cocodrie* (meaning in Spanish *cocodrilla*, the crocodile) was the nickname for the unmixed black-man who lighted *les belles Milatraisses* through the dark narrow streets by the rays of his hand-lantern; but was not allowed to go further than the door of the hall.

*Trouloulou* was applied to the free male octoroon or quadroon who could find admittance to these balls only in the capacity (in those days distinctly menial) of musician, fiddler.

R. M. J.